

Politics and Athena SWAN

Video Transcript

My name is Claire Pierson and I am a Lecturer in Politics here at the University. I'm quite new to the university, I started in September, and my work focuses on women in conflicted and post-conflict societies; in particular, how political institutions and cultures and structures facilitate or impede women's access to rights. My work at the moment really focusses on reproductive rights, abortion and access to abortion, specifically in Ireland.

Most recently, I have worked as a co-investigator on a piece of research looking at access to abortion in the Philippines and South Africa. I'm also a co-investigator on a project funded by a coalition of Irish trade unions that looks at abortion as a worker's rights issue, particularly in Ireland. I'm also a co-founder of a group of academics who look at Northern Irish abortion law and provide briefings, workshops and analysis for academics, policy makers, activists and the general public.

As I've said, I'm quite new to the University of Liverpool, and I started at the same time as a group of seven other members of staff in Politics – six of whom are women. So it was really nice to see our department really committed to ensuring that our department had gender parity in a discipline that can be quite male dominated.

As I've said, my work is really rooted in social justice and social change, so in thinking about Athena SWAN I was trying to think about practical things we can do to try to ensure that we take on gender equality as a core focus in our work. For me, what's really important is having men as allies. I don't think the full burden of the work on gender equality should fall onto women's shoulders and one way I see that happening in the wider academic networks is through things such as all male panels - all male edited collections of books etc., media panels where it's all men - and I know in Ireland there is a network called Academic Manel Watch where they will highlight situations where they see panels that are all male. And men can actually sign up to that to make a commitment to say that they will not participate in events, research grants, media events where it is all male. That then puts a burden on those events to make sure that they include women and have men there as allies.

Another thing that I think is really important is not assuming just an 'add women and stir' approach to including women in institutions, we need to start looking more closely at our culture, our working practices and the power relations built into that and how some of our working practices may not fit all people. So rather than simply women having to adapt to fit into an institution, the institution itself and the culture of the institution has to be adaptable to those people that work within it.

The final thing that is really important to me is thinking about our values, in the work place we're always talking about competencies and merit and productivity, but we need to think really clearly about what our values are and how we sign up to those. One of the things I have done with students and that I've done as part of my work on abortion, is to take part in values workshops which are closed sessions where people take a look at different experiences and different vignettes to think about how their unconscious bias may affect how they treat someone or how they respond to someone, and I think that is something we can take on board as we go forward with Athena SWAN.